

VBS 2026 VBX PRETEEN EXTRAS CONFERENCE PLAN (45 MINUTES)

Purpose Statement

This 45-minute conference plan is designed to encourage and equip church leaders to minister to preteens through rotation activities using Lifeway's *Illumination Station*® VBX curriculum.

Needed Resources

- VBS 2026 VBX® *Preteen Bible Study Leader Guide* (005853428)
- VBS 2026 VBX *Preteen Bible Study Leader Pack* (005853475) — Pull pack item 6: "Theme Verse Poster" and display on the focal wall.
- VBS 2026 VBX *Preteen Activity Books* (005853150)
- VBS 2026 *Music for Kids* (005853747 or 005853488)
- VBS 2026 *Administrative Guide* (005853431)
- VBS 2026 *Crafts Rotation Leader Guide* (005853423)
- VBS 2026 *Recreation Rotation Leader Cards* (005853426)
- VBS 2026 *Wall Art* (005853616)
- VBS 2026 *Visual Pack* (005853615)
- VBS 2026 *String Flags* (005853579)
- VBS 2026 *Supersized Backdrop* (005853613)
- VBS 2026 *Tablecloths* (005853575)
- *Giant Inflatable Game Cube* (005841133) — Inflate for use during the conference.
- CD Player or Bluetooth speaker
- Sample of each of the 5 crafts in the leader guide
- Hula hoops

Room Setup

Arrange chairs in a semi-circle. Decorate the focal wall with a *VBS 2026 Supersized Backdrop*. Cover a table with a *VBS 2026 Tablecloth* and display the curriculum and tabletop decorations. Drape *VBS 2026 String Flags* across the doorway.

Teaching Steps

1. Welcome (5 minutes)

- Play *Illumination Station* music and welcome conferees as they arrive.
- Start by giving guests a chance to move a little bit. Place several hula hoops in a large circle or path around your room and explain that players will walk along that path while the music plays. When the music stops, they will all stand in the hoops. Remove a hula hoop after each round. No one is out; they just have to get creative to get more people into a hoop when the music stops.
- Play a few rounds to get people moving and talking.
- Lead conferees to sit down. Share that this activity can be found on page 30 of the VBX Leader Guide.
- Lead in prayer thanking God for everyone who has sacrificed their time to be here today and for the work they will do with VBX. Thank God for being kind to us and using us to point preteens to His love for them. Ask God to guide the time today and to help everyone leave feeling encouraged and equipped.

2. Preparation for VBX Rotations (5 minutes)

- Grab the inflated *Giant Inflatable Game Cube* and explain that you are going to toss the cube to someone. When a conferee catches it, he must share one thing VBS should

contain/do to be “successful.” Encourage conferees to listen and not repeat an answer already given.

- Toss the cube to as many conferees as time allows. Comment that each of us has unique dynamics at our own VBS, but overall, our goals are the same. We will spend some time illuminating ways to make sure VBX rotations are helping your VBS succeed.
- Mention that some of the terms in the leader guide will be unfamiliar to those who have previously worked with other grades at VBS. Briefly review the “Parts of a VBX Session” (p. 6 of leader guide):
 - Excite — Introduces the theme and Bible content with an icebreaker and introductory activity. Pick one or both activities based on your time.
 - Explore — Engages preteens in the Bible story and makes the Bible connection to daily life. This is the core content. Use these plans no matter what else you choose to include. If your church is using the traditional VBS schedule, start here.
 - Excel — Reviews the Bible story and life application for the day. Pick one or both activities based on your time.
 - Small Group Time — Time to discuss Bible content. One leader will stay with the group all week to develop relationships. This happens during Explore.
- Use the *VBX 2026 Preteen Bible Study Leader Guide* to review the suggested schedule for VBX (p. 6). Emphasize that the timings and order provided in the leader guide correspond to this 3-hour schedule.
 - Worship Rally — 30 minutes
 - Excite — 20 minutes
 - Snack — 15 minutes
 - Explore — 30 minutes
 - VBX Crafts — 25 minutes
 - Missions — 20 minutes
 - Excel — 20 minutes
 - VBX Recreation — 20 minutes
- Explain that the *VBS 2026 Administrative Guide* also provides some other schedule options. The 3-hour schedule suggested (p. 20) is the same as the one in the VBX leader guide, but VBX Crafts and VBX Recreation have been included in the Explore and Excel sections—they haven’t been cut.
- Explain that VBX leaders will need to discuss with their VBS Director what their schedule will be, and plan around that. It is suggested that preteens have separate crafts and recreation activities from younger elementary grades, hosted in their Bible study space, which forms the hub of VBX activity for them, yet participate alongside the other age groups in Worship Rally, snacks, and missions.
- Say: “There are benefits to the schedule as designed for VBX, but you need to determine what works best for your church.”

3. VBX Crafts (15 minutes)

- Explain that just as leaders determine the daily schedule, they also must decide who will lead crafts for preteens. If the VBS Director wants preteens to do the same crafts rotation as the younger grades, then the church should use the *VBS 2026 Crafts Rotation Leader Guide*. However, if the VBS Director wants preteens to have a unique VBX craft experience, the *VBX Preteen Bible Study Leader Guide* provides preteen-specific crafts already tailored to older learners.

- Say: “Preteens love collaboration, creativity, and having ownership of what they make. Consider how to build in choices, ways to work together, and opportunities to reflect spiritually as they create. VBX crafts are intentionally more advanced than younger crafts, while still accessible for kids this age.”
- Explain that each day of VBX includes a recommended craft inside the Bible Study Leader Guide. These are not sold as pre-packaged kits; instead, they use everyday craft supplies plus items from the Leader Pack. They are designed to reinforce the daily point and the theme of light running through Illumination Station.
- Encourage leaders to prepare a sample of each craft before teaching. This helps preteens visualize the final product and reveals which steps may need pre-cutting or prepping ahead of time.
- Briefly summarize each craft for conferees, while showing the completed sample craft.
 - Day 1 Craft: “Jesus is ... Tablet”
 - Show leaders page 15 of the VBX leader guide.
 - Explain that this craft reinforces Day 1’s Spotlight Question (“Who is Jesus?”) and allows preteens to create a paint-filled writing tablet labeled “Jesus Is...” on which they write their personal response using a stylus they assemble themselves.
 - Preteens mix glue and black paint inside a ziplock bag, attach it to a decorated board, and use a stylus to “write” their answer.
 - This craft naturally supports reflection and ownership, two huge developmental needs for preteens.
 - Day 2 Craft: “Color Wheel”
 - Hold up page 22 of the leader guide.
 - Explain that preteens construct a color wheel using layered circles and a brad, combining colors to “see things in a new light.”
 - Around the wheels, they will write portions of the statement “Jesus is God’s perfect Son.”
 - This craft fits beautifully with the Day 2 Bible study (Jesus’ baptism) where God publicly revealed who Jesus truly is.
 - Day 3 Craft: “Lunch Sack Luminaries”
 - Display page 29 of the leader guide.
 - Explain that preteens will create Lunch Sack Luminaries using Pack Item 25, decorative-edged scissors, pushpins, bamboo skewers, and small battery-powered votives.
 - The leader guide ties this craft to Day 3’s Bible story about Jesus’ power—kids make a glowing reminder that Jesus is the powerful Son of God.
 - Preteens may use the template provided or design their own patterns.
 - Day 4 Craft: “Glow-In-The-Dark Zipper Pull”
 - Show page 36 of the leader guide.
 - Preteens will make a cross-shaped zipper pull using glow-in-the-dark pony beads, elastic cord, and a lanyard hook.
 - This craft reinforces Day 4’s Point: Jesus is the proven Son of God—a simple but meaningful way for preteens to display their faith.
 - Encourage each preteen to attach her zipper pull to a backpack or jacket.
 - Day 5 Craft: “Noiseless Neon Tumble Game”
 - Show page 43 of the leader guide.

- Explain that Day 5's craft is a colorful STEM-style balance build using lightweight plastic bottles, neon straws, neon tape, and pom-poms.
- This hands-on activity gives preteens an opportunity to reflect on the motto, "Jesus is the Light of the world," as well as all they have learned this week.
- Preteens enjoy experimenting with balance, weight distribution, and decoration.
- Say: "These crafts were intentionally created to be engaging for preteens—hands-on, collaborative, reflective, and connected to biblical truth. As you lead, remember that every craft is a ministry moment. Look for opportunities to point preteens back to Jesus, the Light of the world."

4. VBX Recreation (15 minutes)

- Comment: "Remember our earlier discussion about crafts and scheduling. The same principle applies here: if your VBS Director wants preteens to rotate with the younger grades, rec leaders will use the *VBS 2026 Recreation Rotation Leader Cards*. But if VBX will run its own recreation time, then you will use the games printed in your VBX leader guide."
- Explain that each day of VBX includes two suggested recreation games designed to support movement, teamwork, and friendly competition—things preteens love.
- Emphasize the importance of knowing where recreation will take place. Some games work best outside or in a gym; others fit a classroom or hallway.
- Say: "Some recreation games require minimal preparation and rely mostly on pack items, while others need additional supplies. Preparation is key. Organize materials early—either commit to one game or prepare both options so you can adapt depending on your group or space."
 - Day 1 Recreation — "Light the Way" and "Sunburst"
 - Show page 16 of the VBX leader guide.
 - "Light the Way" introduces the theme visually and physically, helping preteens consider what it means that Jesus reveals truth and guides His followers. This activity requires minimal supplies but helps set the tone for the session.
 - "Sunburst!" uses balloons and pack items to engage students in fast-paced retrieval, teamwork, and assembling the words of the Spotlight Question and Answer for the day.
 - This game works indoors or outdoors but needs moderate space for movement. Make sure to pick up all the balloon pieces!
 - Highlight that there is a suggested special needs adaptation that would also help in a smaller space.
 - Day 2 Recreation — "Light Up the World!" and "Lightning Bug Tag"
 - Show page 23 of the Leader Guide.
 - "Light Up the World!" uses glow bracelets and pack item 23, giving preteens a kinetic way to assemble today's Spotlight Answer: "*Jesus is the perfect Son of God who came to be the Savior of the world.*"
 - "Lightning Bug Tag" uses the "Day 2 Bonus Verse Poster" (pack item 8) and plays like a high-energy chase game with a Scripture-based twist.
 - Preteens must shout part of the verse when seeking safety, reinforcing Scripture in a fun way. Mention the suggested special needs adaptation allowing a "bird" to use a shortened pool noodle for tagging.

- Comment: “This activity is fantastic for helping preteens find connection—partners, groups, and shared movement experiences help students feel they belong.”
 - Day 3 Recreation — “Laser Maze” and “Musical Spotlights”
 - Show page 30 of the leader guide.
 - “Laser Maze” provides a problem-solving challenge as preteens navigate a maze of string “laser beams” without touching them.
 - Say: “This game strongly engages abstract thinking and strategic planning—two developmental characteristics we discussed earlier.”
 - “Musical Spotlights” incorporates movement, rhythm, and quick thinking.
 - Point out to conferees that they played a version of this game at the beginning of the session.
 - When the music stops, preteens must land in a spotlight even as spotlights disappear each round.
 - This game can be played in small or large spaces and can be paced up or down depending on group energy.
 - Say: “Day 3’s games are excellent for building collaboration and encouraging preteens to talk through strategy—both things they naturally crave at this age.”
 - Day 4 Recreation — “Mirror Ball Balance Race” and “Glow-in-the-dark Ring Toss”
 - Show page 37 of the leader guide.
 - “Mirror Ball Balance Race” requires a large space and engages teamwork as pairs balance a ball between their elbows.
 - Say: “This game caters to preteens’ desire for competition and teamwork. You can adapt it for smaller spaces, but if the room is too tight, selecting the second game may be a better option.”
 - “Glow-in-the-dark Ring Toss” uses the “Day 4 Bonus Verse Poster” (pack item 10) and glow necklaces to create a relay-style toss game.
 - Each bottle features part of Mark 15:39, giving repeated exposure to the key verse.
 - This is a strong opportunity to review the gospel message using the game’s natural pauses.
 - Say: “Direct attention to the Gospel Poster (pack item 29) when playing this game. Any time you can reinforce the 5 symbols and 10 words of *The Gospel: God’s Plan for Me*, you help build strong gospel fluency.”
 - Day 5 Recreation — “Human Light Bright” and “Foosball Feet”
 - Show page 44 of the leader guide.
 - “Human Light Bright” uses balloons and teamwork to create a large group “image”.
 - This is a high-energy, high-cooperation activity perfect for the final day.
 - “Foosball Feet” uses pool noodles and a beach ball to turn the room or field into a human-sized foosball table.
 - This game works in almost any playing area and encourages communication and group problem solving.
 - Say: “This activity gives a great transition point into discussing the urgency responding to the gospel, as kids had to urgently respond in the midst of the game.”
- Show pages 7–8 of the leader guide.
- Highlight how the supply lists are broken down by day, session component, and activity name, making it easy to prepare totes or bins for each day.

- Say: “Preparing your supplies ahead of time—especially for recreation—will take stress off your shoulders during VBS week and will help all volunteers feel confident.”

5. **Closing** (5 minutes)

- Show conferees the “Theme Verse Poster” (leader pack item 6) on the wall and read it aloud with them.
- Set a timer for 2 minutes and ask conferees to talk to the people around them to brainstorm ways they could incorporate the verse or motto into any of the games or crafts.
- Give conferees a moment to share when time expires.
- Encourage conferees to remember that the gospel must be the center of all they do. Say: “We started this session by discussing what would make your VBS a ‘success.’ Take what you have learned now and make sure your preparation and planning sets up your VBX to meet those goals.
- Close in prayer, asking for God’s blessings over each VBS represented in the room. Ask for God’s wisdom as conferees prepare and for preteens to experience transformation through Christ this summer.